

The Queen's death and the fraud of an apolitical monarchy

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14 September 2022

As part of the deluge of endless media coverage glorifying Queen Elizabeth II and promoting King Charles III, in Australia and internationally, there is a concerted effort to preserve the myth of a non-political “constitutional monarchy,” acting in accordance with parliamentary democracy.

Buried as much as possible are references to the extensive murky powers of the royalty, still carefully preserved from the old absolute British monarchy, to intervene behind the parliamentary façade.

Much is stake for the ruling class and its political servants in maintaining the myth, both for ideological purposes and to be able to invoke the powers, especially in acute political crises, including to dismiss elected governments, as happened in Australia in 1975.

After hailing Elizabeth as “an emotional and enduring symbol of popular monarchism,” Paul Kelly, the editor-in-chief of Rupert Murdoch’s *Australian*, cautioned that “the people respected the Queen but correctly assumed she had no power over them. This was pivotal.”

Even during the archaic mourning rituals, however, King Charles provided a glimpse of the real role of the monarchy, as an institution of imperialist rule.

The *Australian* reported: “The King intervened to ensure that Australia’s representative, along with other Five Eyes security countries, New Zealand and Canada, were front row in the royal box at the parliamentary condolence motion of both houses of parliament.”

This royal intervention highlights the active part to be played by the new king, like his mother, in defending the interests of British imperialism. The “Five Eyes” countries—the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—operate a global surveillance and intelligence web that is crucial for their military interventions and anti-democratic intrigues around the world. This is particularly the case now with the US-NATO proxy war against Russia as well as the mounting US-led confrontation with China.

Not accidentally, US President Joe Biden will be centre stage at the Queen’s funeral, along with the leaders of the Commonwealth countries—the former British Empire—and a roll-call of other Western-aligned leaders and dignitaries. They all recognise the services provided by the monarchy, throughout the Queen’s 70-year reign, to shoring up and providing a veneer of legitimacy to capitalist rule.

In an effort to maintain the mythology of the Queen as a non-political figurehead, Kelly insisted that the monarchy played no

part in the 1975 dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government in Australia by the governor-general, the vice-regal representative of the Queen as Australia’s head of state. “At every juncture she upheld constitutional propriety including during the 1975 crisis contrary to false claims about her alleged improper actions,” he wrote.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In 2020, the long-blocked release of the intensive correspondence between the Queen’s Palace and Governor-General Sir John Kerr confirmed that Kerr conspired closely with the monarch and her top-level advisers in the British ruling establishment in ousting Whitlam’s government.

During the protracted political crisis, Kerr exchanged no less than 212 letters with the Queen, but always through her official private secretary, Sir Martin Charteris, a former high-ranking military officer. Throughout the correspondence, which clearly encouraged and supported Whitlam’s dismissal as prime minister, great care was taken to deny, on any official record, that the Queen herself was involved.

The letters also show that Charles, then the young heir to the throne, was directly involved. He discussed with Kerr the possibility of removing Whitlam’s government. That occurred in September 1975, just two months before the “Canberra Coup,” while Charles was in Papua New Guinea to represent his mother at that country’s formal independence ceremony.

In March 1976, Charles sent Kerr a handwritten note, supporting him against ongoing demonstrations against the dismissal, saying: “What you did last year was right and the courageous thing to do.”

Kerr, a US-connected ex-intelligence officer and judge, served as the instrument for the government’s removal, which was backed by Washington, precisely because the 1901 Australian Constitution preserves all the ancient “reserve powers” of the monarchy, via the governor-general, including to dismiss a government.

Kerr himself retained intimate links with the Australian, British and US spy agencies, as well as with the Australian military forces, which he placed on alert during the coup.

The “Canberra Coup” was part of the response in the ruling class internationally to the global upsurge of the working class and potentially revolutionary struggles that erupted from the May–June 1968 general strike in France on. That convulsive time included the bringing down of the Heath government by a miners’ strike in the UK and the downfall of the Nixon administration in the US,

both in 1974, the final defeat of the US military in Vietnam in 1975, and the ousting of dictatorships in Portugal, Greece and Spain in 1974–76.

Whitlam's government was ousted because it had failed to stem the powerful movement of the working class that had brought Labor to office in 1972, after 23 years of Conservative Party government. Throughout 1973 and 1974, workers launched the greatest strike wave since 1919, forcing unprecedented wage increases and other concessions from alarmed employers amid soaring inflation.

Despite Whitlam appeasing the Nixon administration, there also remained related concerns in Washington over Labor's ability to stem the popular opposition to the US military alliance, triggered by the horrors of the Vietnam War and the presence of the key US satellite spy base at Pine Gap in central Australia.

The dismissal sparked days of mass strikes and huge protests. Acutely conscious of the danger of a working-class revolt, Whitlam and the Labor leaders did everything they could to prevent it. Whitlam and the then Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) president Bob Hawke insisted that the dismissal had to be accepted, and the widespread popular outrage channelled back behind re-electing a Labor government.

Above all, the coup's success relied on these Labor and union leaderships, particularly their so-called "left" factions, and the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia (CPA). They worked together to block a political general strike that was spontaneously developing across the country.

Hawke, who was acting throughout this period as a US informant, spelled out the fears of the labour bureaucrats on the day of the coup. He declared: "What has happened today could unleash forces in this country the like of which we have never seen ... and therefore it is important that the Australian people respond to leadership."

This response by Labor and the unions demoralised workers and convinced significant sections of the middle class that the coup masters had prevailed. In the elections held a month later, they swung behind the Liberal-Country Coalition's promises of a return to stability.

A warning for today

Regardless of all the reassurances that the powers of the monarchy are exercised only on the "advice" of elected government leaders, 1975 was not the only royal intervention in an explosive political crisis. In 1932, the New South Wales (NSW) governor dismissed that state's Lang Labor government for trying to quell workers' anger by resisting a vicious austerity program imposed by the British banks amid the Great Depression.

Today's lauding of the monarchy is a warning that the monarchy's powers are being preserved for use in a new period of working-class upsurge that has begun. Strikes and protests are developing globally, triggered by the pandemic catastrophe, the cost-of-living crisis, staggering social inequality and the impact of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

In Australia, despite every effort by the trade unions to hold workers down, stoppages by nurses, teachers, aged care workers and others have begun to emerge after four decades of suppression by the union apparatuses since their Accords with the Hawke

Labor government in 1983.

In May, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor government took office with the support of less than a third of the electorate. Because of their years of enforcing attacks on workers' conditions, Labor and the unions—whose membership has plummeted—no longer have the grip they did in 1975 over broad sections of workers. The Stalinist CPA no longer even exists.

Nevertheless, big business is counting on this government, backed by the unions, to stifle the demands of workers, including for wages rises to match soaring inflation, and to push through further pro-business restructuring. If Labor and the unions fail to deliver the demands of the ruling class, the anti-democratic machinations of the monarchy are likely to be activated again.

Noticeably, despite being a professed republican, Albanese has become one of the most fervent defenders of the Queen and the new king. He even declared that by shutting down parliament this week, in accordance with royal protocols, he showed that he is a prime minister who "follows tradition, who follows protocols and who follows order."

Whatever the "protocols," Governor-General David Hurley, a former military chief, secretly appointed Albanese's Liberal-National predecessor Scott Morrison to five powerful ministries in 2020 and 2021 amid the pandemic, fearing social unrest. That proves the readiness of the ruling class to resort to extra-parliamentary forms of rule.

Those appointments were accompanied by the proclamation of a "National Cabinet"—a de facto coalition regime with no constitutional or legislative basis—to block working-class demands for protection from the pandemic, as much as possible. The Albanese government has retained this cabal of federal, state and territory government leaders, shrouded by secrecy and confidentiality provisions.

The Labor government's line up behind the autocratic monarchy, now with King Charles III as its figurehead, underscores the necessity for workers to make a political break from the Labor and union apparatuses, and form genuine workers' organisations—independent rank-and-file committees.

These committees can and must play a leading role in defending the basic democratic rights, safety and social interests of the working class. This is bound up with the fight for a socialist program, for workers to overturn this whole reactionary political and economic order, and form a workers' government, to totally reorganise life on the basis of human need, not corporate profit.



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